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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 12/28/07

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3) Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei)

Prime Minister's schedule, December 26

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
December 27, 2007

09:41

Met with Natural Resources and Energy Agency Natural Resources and Fuel Department Director General Kitagawa at the Kantei. Then met with Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Ono and Foreign Ministry Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Director General Sasae.

10:26

Met with New Komeito head Ota, followed by Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Futahashi.

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11:29

Met with Zhu Jianrong, representative of the Society of Chinese Professors in Japan.

13:09

Arrived at the official residence.

14:20

Left Haneda Airport by government plane to visit China.

Evening (local time)

Arrived at Beijing Capital International Airport. Stayed overnight at Beijing Chang Fu Gong Center Hotel.

4) New antiterror bill into next year

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Abridged)
December 28, 2007

The House of Councillors Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee

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yesterday ended its debate for the year on a new antiterror bill resuming the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean. The committee's first meeting for the coming year is scheduled for Jan. 8. Prime Minister Fukuda will be present. The ruling coalition proposed winding up the committee's discussions on the bill and taking a vote on it that day. However, the leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) insisted on discussing its own bill presented as a counterproposal to the new antiterror bill.

5) New antiterrorism bill may clear Diet on Jan. 11

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Slightly abridged)
December 28, 2007

The ruling parties have now taken the offensive in managing Diet affairs. The ruling coalition-controlled House of Representatives is expected to take an override vote possibly on Jan. 11 on the special measures bill to resume the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling activities in the Indian Ocean which has been the main focus of attention in the current Diet session. The ruling bloc plans to submit to the next regular Diet session, at the outset, a bill temporarily maintaining the rate for revenue sources set aside for road construction, paving the way for taking a second vote on that bill before the end of March. It intends to observe how the opposition camp will act, while seeking to hold in check the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto).

The House of Councillors Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, which has been deliberating on the government's new antiterrorism special measures bill, confirmed in a meeting yesterday of its directors a plan to hold a next session on Jan. 8. The committee is scheduled to summon Naoki Akiyama of the Japan-U.S. Peace and Cultural Exchange to testify as a Diet witness. In the session, the ruling coalition proposed putting the bill to a vote, but the DPJ rejected it.

The Upper House, which is controlled by the opposition bloc, will likely take a vote on the bill in committee on Jan. 10 and the main vote in a plenary session on the 11th. The outlook is that once the bill is voted down in the Upper House, the ruling camp will readopt it with a two-thirds majority override vote in the House of Representatives even on the 11th, without holding a consultative meeting of both Diet chambers.

The Upper House committee yesterday started debating a bill on Afghanistan aid measures submitted by the DPJ as a counterproposal to the government-sponsored bill to resume the MSDF refueling mission. DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa stressed in a press conference in the city of Kumamoto:

"The government's interpretation of the Constitution and the way of its thinking of international contribution are fundamentally different from those of our party. Since the two different arguments are submitted to the Diet, I want the public to understand (the DPJ's bill)."

The ruling camp will not budge an inch in deliberations on bills related to tax system reform, including road-connected ones, in the regular session to be convened in January. It decided yesterday in a meeting of its Diet affairs committee chiefs to submit the road-related bills earlier than the scheduled on in early January,

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aiming at priority on deliberations on those bills, along with a supplementary budget bill for fiscal 2007.

6) Diet begins debate on DPJ's antiterror bill

SANKEI (Page 5) (Full)
December 28, 2007

The House of Councillors Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee in the Diet met yesterday and entered into debate on a bill presented by the leading opposition Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) as a counterproposal to a new antiterror bill introduced by the government to resume the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling activities in the Indian Ocean. The DPJ-presented bill is intended to assist Afghanistan with its reconstruction for the purpose of preventing and eradicating international terrorism. The committee's substantive discussions will be carried over to next year. However, the ruling bench will fast-track the new antiterror bill.

The DPJ bill proposes sending Self-Defense Forces members and civilians to Afghanistan for humanitarian and reconstruction assistance and for public security reform. Specifically, it incorporates measures for Japan to engage SDF members and civilians in disarming, medical support, transportation, and other activities. Masayuki Naoshima, chairman of the DPJ's policy board, explained the bill before the committee.

The DPJ bill says Japan will help the Afghan government create an agreement with Taliban and other armed groups to halt conflicts. Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura, however, criticized the DPJ bill, saying, "It's difficult and inappropriate for the Japanese government to promote and assist this." The DPJ bill also says Japan's humanitarian and reconstruction activities will be conducted in "non-combat zones" where civilians will not be affected. Koumura also said it would be difficult to specify such conflict-free areas for locals in Afghanistan.

The committee, prior to its debate yesterday, held a meeting of its directors. In that meeting, the ruling parties proposed winding up the committee's discussions on the new antiterror law and take a vote on it on Jan. 8. However, the ruling and opposition parties failed to reach an agreement.

7) Chief cabinet secretary: DPJ's new antiterror bill "is not realistic"

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
December 28, 2007

Ryuko Tadokoro

The Upper House Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defense yesterday held its last meeting during the year, in which Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura criticized the major opposition

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Democratic Party of Japan's (DPJ) counterproposal to the government-sponsored new antiterrorism special measures bill by noting: "The DPJ's bill gives the impression that the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) will be sent to a safe area but civilians will be sent to a dangerous area. This approach is not realistic." Machimura, who has usually taken the brunt of the opposition bloc's attack against the government's bill, now sarcastically said: "I want to take the

floor as a questioner and ask those in the DPJ who drafted the

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bill."

The DPJ's counterproposal is titled "a special measures bill aimed at preventing and eliminating international terrorism and helping Afghanistan to reconstruct itself". In the session yesterday, the DPJ gave an explanation of the bill and the debate on the bill began. The feature of the bill is that areas for the SDF to operate are limited to where a cease-fire agreement is signed or where the local residents will not suffer any harm. Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura also pointed out: "It is unrealistic to assume that the Karzai government will make peace with the Taliban. It is also difficult to specify areas where residents will not suffer any harm."

8) DPJ to put off introduction of censure motion against prime minister; Card to be preserved for regular Diet session

SANKEI (Page 1) (Full)
December 28, 2007

The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) yesterday decided not to introduce to the Upper House a censure motion against Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, a focus of attention in the extraordinary Diet session, as a countermeasure against the ruling camp's move to put the new antiterrorism special measures bill to a vote again in the Lower House. Its strategy is to corner Fukuda into a dissolution of the Lower House and a snap election by continuing its offensive into the regular Diet session regarding issues directly related to people's lives, such as pensions and the abolition of the provisional gasoline tax, which will lead to reductions in gasoline prices, by preserving the censure motion card. More than one DPJ official revealed this strategy.

The government and the ruling parties are determined to have the new antiterror legislation enacted by putting it to a vote again in the Lower House during the current session, which is to end on Jan. 15, 2008, if opposition parties vote down the legislation or carry it to the next session in the Upper House, where the opposition camp has a majority.

Some DPJ members insisted on countering the ruling parties by introducing a censure motion. However, even if it is adopted in the Upper House, it is not legally binding, which would necessitate the opposition camp trying to corner the administration into a dissolution of the Lower House or resignation by resorting to a strategy of refusing to attend Diet deliberations after the prime minister has been censured.

If opposition parties pass a censure motion coinciding with the passage of the legislation, they might lose public support, because they would have to stay away from Diet deliberations on the fiscal 2008 budget bill starting in late January. The People's New Party, which has a joint parliamentary group with the DPJ, is also cautious about the idea of introducing a censure motion. However, if the ruling parties force through the introduction of related bills aimed at maintaining the provisional gasoline tax during the current Diet session or public support ratings for the cabinet dramatically drop, the DPJ would reconsider the possibility of introducing the censure motion at the end of the Diet session.

9) ISAF complementary to police: Koumura

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YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
December 28, 2007

Foreign Minister Koumura yesterday attended a meeting of the House of Councillors Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, in which he explained the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) deployed to Afghanistan. "Based on the Afghan government's consent,

the ISAF is complementarily undertaking some of Afghanistan's policing activities in order to recover or maintain public security." The government has so far taken the position that the Self-Defense Forces' participation in ISAF conflicts with the Constitution because the ISAF uses armed force. However, the government formally revised such a standpoint with the foreign minister's statement before the committee.

10) Government's draft bill aimed at offering blanket relief to hepatitis C patients recognizes its responsibility for causing drug-induced infection; Ruling bloc intends to bring complete settlement to the case

SANKEI (Page 1) (Excerpts)
December 28, 2007

The ruling bloc's project team that is drafting a bill aimed at offering blanket relief to those who were infected with hepatitis C via tainted blood products yesterday decided to include in the bill a phrase substantially admits the government's responsibility for causing drug-induced infection, a major point at issue so far. The plaintiffs suing the government and drug makers for drug-caused hepatitis C infection strongly demanded that the government acknowledge its responsibility for the infection. The ruling parties and the plaintiffs are to meet for final consultations today. The case of hepatitis C victims is now expected to be settled completely in five years after those victims brought the case to the court.

According to an informed source, the bill in its preamble will include this passage: "The government admits its responsibility for damage the patients infected with hepatitis C suffer and failure to prevent the spread of the infection and offers a sincere apology to the hepatitis C victims. Although the passage does not use the wording "responsibility for the infection," what the passage implies would be understood by the plaintiffs. An insider in the ruling bloc commented: "Agreement has been reached in principle. The bill will take shape today."

So far the government had admitted "its responsibility for the results" and "moral responsibility" to offer relief to the victims, but it had strongly refused to admit its "responsibility for the infection," in part because some local district courts' rulings said that there was no error in the government's pharmaceutical administration and primarily because if the government does so, that would have a significant impact on its pharmaceutical administration.

Administrative Vice Health Minister Takeshi Erikawa told a press briefing yesterday: "Pharmaceuticals have both efficacy and side-effects. If the government recognizes its responsibility for the infection, it will become impossible to manufacture pharmaceuticals that will have side-effects."

In response to those press remarks, the plaintiffs asserted; "The government should learn a lesson from this drug-caused infection

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case and on its responsibility, it should offer blanket relief to all the victims."

11) Prime minister's major challenge in China is how to resolve gas-field development dispute in a mutually beneficial way

ASAHI (Page 4) (Excerpts)
December 28, 2007

Prime Minister Fukuda arrived in Beijing for talks with Chinese government leaders last evening. Since former Prime Minister Abe visited that nation in October last year, which marked the first visit by a Japanese prime minister in five years, the two countries have successfully established the formula of reciprocal summit visits. A major challenge for Fukuda in this visit is to enhance what government officials call a mutually beneficial bilateral relationship based on common strategic interests, on which Abe agreed on when he visited China. As part of this challenge, how to resolve the dispute over gas exploration rights in the East China

Sea is likely to be the touchstone of Fukuda's ability.

Speaking before reporters, Fukuda indicated his eagerness to resolve this thorny issue, remarking: "It is desirable to settle the issue as soon as possible. This is a matter that involves another party, so if we talk, we will be able to reach an agreement."

The spots cited for joint development are on the Japan-set median boundary line, which China has not recognized. This gap has made negotiations on the issue difficult. The dispute is sharpening mainly over how to treat the gas fields under development by China, including the Chunxiao (called Shirakaba by Japan) gas field; and what to do about funds and technical cooperation for joint development and how to treat products there.

Japan: "It is unacceptable to include the area straddling the median line in our joint development plan."

China: "We have not recognized and will never recognize the (Japan-claimed) median line."

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea stipulates that a state's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) extends to a distance of 200 nautical miles (about 370 kilometers) out from its coast. But since the distance between the Japanese and Chinese coastal baselines is short and their EEZs overlap, the two countries have yet to agree on a median line. Japan regards a line equidistant from both sides' coastal baselines as the median line, but China insists on the Okinawa Trough as the line.

Even if both sides are eager to resolve the issue based on a political decision, they need to give careful consideration to domestic public opinion, because the issue is linked to the sovereignty issue. Depending on how the issue is settled, nationalism may well up. The domestic standing of the Fukuda administration, which was launched in September, remains weak, given that the opposition camp holds a majority in the House of Councillors. The government under President Hu Jintao was reshuffled at the Communist Party Convention in October, so its political footing is also still weak. A source familiar with Japan-China relations said: "Both sides must find it difficult to accept a risk that could deal a blow to them."

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Even so, moves are gaining momentum to resolve the gas-field development standoff in the upcoming meeting between Fukuda and Hu. In a meeting between Foreign Minister Koumura and his Chinese counterpart Yang Jiechi in Beijing on Dec. 1, both agreed that the two countries will make a political decision in an effort to resolve the issue by the time of Prime Minister Fukuda's visit to China. Afterward, China unofficially asked Japan for joint development on an area straddling the median line. As it stands, China has finally begun to "move forward." A Chinese source said: "This is a major concession for China."

China, though, has indicated an unwillingness to accept Japan's proposal for jointly developing the gas fields now under development independently by China by investing funds, such as the Chunxiao gas field.

12) Fukuda demonstrates his own diplomatic imprint with appointment of Yabunaka as vice foreign minister; Strong lineup to deal with DPRK

MAINICHI (Page 5) (Full)
December 28, 2007

Yudai Nakazawa

The government will reshuffle major personnel in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) after the extraordinary session of the Diet ends in mid-January. The reshuffle includes appointing Deputy Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka as administrative vice foreign minister, apparently reflecting the strong wishes of Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, who has made diplomacy his lifework. The new lineup of

the key MOFA officials shows clearly Fukuda's unique diplomatic imprint that is quite different from that of his predecessor Shinzo Abe.

When Fukuda served as chief cabinet secretary in the Koizumi administration, Yabunaka, along with then Deputy Foreign Minister Hitoshi Tanaka, conducted negotiations with North Korea. Fukuda has a strong faith in Yabunaka -- who at one point served as Japan's chief delegate to the six-party talks to discuss the North Korean nuclear issue -- for the steady way he gets the job done.

Kenichiro Sasae, director-general of the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, who is expected to be installed as Yabunaka's successor, and Akitaka Saiki, minister at the Japanese Embassy in the United States, who is expected to be chosen as Sasae's replacement, both have extensive experience in negotiating with North Korea. Given that Fukuda wants to resolve the abduction issue while he is in office, the new ministry lineup is seen as having a North Korea focus.

With an eye on developments in the U.S. presidential campaign and the election next November, Fukuda intends to have Ambassador Ryozo Kato, who has been in that post seven years, retire after the Group of Eight summit conference at Lake Toya, Hokkaido, next July. But it is not clear when he will replace Kato, because the appointment of his successor will be affected by the political situation in the U.S.

As Kato's successor, a most likely candidate is Ichiro Fujisaki, ambassador to the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva. Fujisaki served as

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director-general of the North American Affairs Bureau and deputy foreign minister.

Ambassador to Indonesia Shin Ebihara was also rumored to be the next ambassador to the U.S., but he is expected to succeed Ambassador to the United Kingdom Yoshiji Nogami. Former Ambassador to Ireland Keiichi Hayashi is likely to be appointed as director-general of the Secretariat.

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13) Japan to announce at Davos Conference a plan to set own numerical targets for greenhouse gas emissions cuts

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
December 28, 2007

Prime Minister Fukuda has decided to announce in the annual assembly of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in late January that Japan will set its own medium- to long-term targets to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. It seems difficult to work out targeted numerical figures by the meeting, but the prime minister hopes to present such figures at the Lake Toya Summit in Hokkaido next July. The Japanese government was negative about setting targets out of consideration to concern in domestic industrial circles about a decline in Japanese firms' competitiveness in the international community, but it has made a policy switch, with a desire to demonstrate its leadership in forming a post-Kyoto framework.

In a meeting on an international strategy to deal with the global warming issue yesterday with the environment minister, the economy, trade and industry minister, and the foreign minister, Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura revealed the government's plan to set reduction

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targets.

In the 13th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held in Bali, Indonesia, this month, Japan, together with the United States, opposed the policy of setting numerical targets. Japan's judgment was that in order to have such large gas emitters as the U.S.,

China, and India take part in a new framework, it would not be wise to set numerical targets at the present stage. Japan's stance met strong reactions from the European Union (EU) and developing countries.

The global-warming issue will be high on the agenda at the Lake Toya Summit, which Japan will chair. If Japan allows other participants to continue to regard it as a "force of resistance," Japan will not be able to demonstrate leadership. Given this circumstance, the prime minister intends to announce in the Davos Conference, which will bring about world political and economic leaders that Japan will achieve the 6 PERCENT target set in the Kyoto Protocol and then shoulder a further obligation to reduce gas emissions.

14) Government to strengthen greenhouse gas emissions reduction goal in post-Kyoto Protocol framework: Mulling introduction of numerical target for each country

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 3) (Full)
December 28, 2007

The Kyoto Protocol for greenhouse gas emissions reduction measures ends in 2013. In connection with the post-Kyoto framework, the

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government yesterday started considering the possibility of setting country-specific numerical targets for cutting greenhouse gases, the aim being to further increase Japan's goal to cut emissions 6 PERCENT from the 1990 level.

In setting a target number, the government plans to work out a new method centering on the feasibility of industry-specific emissions reduction goals and ask other countries in talks with them to adopt the same method. It will also call on participants to agree on the idea at the G-8 Summit in Hokkaido to be held in July next year.

The government is also undergoing coordination with the possibility of Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda announcing the plan there when he attends the annual plenary session of the World Economic Forum to be held in Davos, Switzerland in late January next year. However, with the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and the Japan Business Federation strongly opposing the setting of numerical targets, efforts to obtain an agreement on the proposal could run into complications.

Japan also intends to propose a global energy conservation acceleration strategy aimed at improving by 2020 energy efficiency by 30 PERCENT from the 2005 level.

DONOVAN